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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000797

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [PREF](#) [UNSC](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: UNSCOL CONCERN ABOUT IMPACT ON TRIBUNAL
OF NEW CABINET

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) The office of the UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon in Beirut is concerned that opposition members of the new Lebanese cabinet may seek to impede the UN SYG's effort to establish the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, says the UNSCOL chief of staff. The new UN Special Representative, Johan Verbeke, arrives in Beirut June 4 and likely will focus on election reform, border issues, rule of law and Palestinian matters. End Summary.

12. (C) The chief of staff for the Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL), Jack Christofides, expressed concern to DCM on May 28 that there may be trouble getting the Special Tribunal for Lebanon launched if opposition members of the still-to-be-formed new Lebanese cabinet seek to obstruct it. Christofides pointed out that UNSCR 1757 which created the Tribunal says that the UN SYG will establish it in consultation with the GOL. Christofides hypothesized that the members of the "blocking third" of the cabinet from the opposition may seek to obstruct GOL cooperation on issues such as Lebanon's financial contribution to the Tribunal or the handover to the Tribunal of the cases of the four generals detained in 2005. While Ban Ki-moon probably could move ahead on the Tribunal without GOL endorsement, he might feel more constrained politically.

13. (C) Christofides said the new Special Coordinator, Belgian diplomat Johan Verbeke, arrives in Beirut June 4. Given the completion of the Doha Agreement, Christofides expects Verbeke to be less involved than his predecessor, Geir Pederson, in work on the Lebanese political impasse and will focus more on election reform, border issues, rule of law and Palestinian matters. In his first weeks, Verbeke will concentrate on the draft of the UNSCR 1701 report due to UN headquarters by mid-June and also attend the Nahr al-Barid donors conference in Vienna June 22-23. Christofides says Verbeke will travel to Israel and also may go to Syria in his first weeks.

14. (C) Christofides talked about other areas in which UNSCOL may seek a role in the post-Doha environment. He expects the new Lebanese cabinet to be weak or divided, with the result that more decisions will be pushed to President Sleiman for resolution than would be the case otherwise. He said the UN is interested in helping Sleiman with defense strategy, which

Christofides said is part of UNSCR 1701.

15. (C) The UNSCOL chief of staff said a new Lebanon Independent Border Assessment Team (LIBAT) mission would be arriving in Lebanon in the coming weeks and may also go to Damascus. Noting that the Doha agreement called for establishment of an independent election commission to organize the 2009 parliamentary election, Christofides said the UN would be able to serve in that role. He said UNSCOL has requested a UN election reform team to come to Lebanon to discuss that with UNSCOL staff.

16. (C) Christofides meets with Hizballah regularly, most recently just after the violence involving Hizballah's forces in early May. He sensed that that Hizballah needed to recover from that fighting and noted that there is a rumor Hizballah lost more people in the fighting than it had indicated. Christofides said much of UNSCOL's recent discussions with Hizballah concerned access to the area around UNSCOL's offices, since Hizballah severely limited access during the recent conflict.

COMMENT

17. (C) Negotiations on the cabinet for the national unity government begin May 30. Embassy will watch for signals that the opposition members of that cabinet are seeking to undermine establishment of the Special Tribunal. End comment.

SISON